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ABSTRACT

Research shows that turnover in managerial positions can cost an organization from 5 to 25 times an employee's monthly salary. Although some turnover is inevitable, many times it is caused by employee dissatisfaction with the job or its conditions, and this dissatisfaction is often directly attributable to stress resulting from role conflict or ambiguity. This is especially relevant to faculty in educational institutions who experience demands to perform many discrete tasks. Further, the stress factors felt by faculty tend to affect chairpersons to a greater degree. Dissatisfied employees who remain on the job tend to be unproductive and reduce the productivity of others, while dissatisfied department chairpersons can have disastrous effects on the morale of a department or division. Research has shown that the administrator's role is more important than environment, structure, and institution type in accounting for performance of the department. However, research has also found that the chair's position is fraught with role conflict and ambiguity. Since the quality of a college is determined by the quality of the departments and administrative behavior, then the levels and causes of job satisfaction among chairpersons must be investigated and addressed. Contains 19 references. (TGI)

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JOB DISSATISFACTION AND TURNOVER AMONG TWO YEAR COLLEGE DEPARTMENT/DIVISION CHAIRPERSONS

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This study was designed to measure the propensity of department/division chairpersons to leave the college, the levels of satisfaction felt with the job, and their perceptions of role conflict and ambiguity. A survey was sent to 600 two-year college department/division chairpersons with 278 (46.3%) returned.

Turnover in managerial positions can cost an organization "from five to twenty-five times an employee's monthly salary" (Glick, 1992, p. 627). When calculating the cost of turnover, Cano and Miller (1992) point out "the negative effects of job turnover on organizations may include: increased costs to recruit, select, and train new employees; demoralization of remaining employees; negative public relations; disruption of day-to-day activities; decreased organizational opportunities to pursue growth strategies" (p. 9). McBride, Munday & Tunnell (1992) add

> effectiveness is affected when projects cannot be started or, if already underway, completed because of employee turnover. In addition, studies have shown that turnover can create a decline in morale among employees who stay. The employee who leaves is missed for both job-related and social reasons. Co-workers feel this loss, and at the same time they must learn to deal with the replacement (p. 159).

Although some employee turnover is unavoidable all to often turnover is caused by an employee's dissatisfaction with the job and/or the conditions of the job). "As satisfaction with growth opportunities, salary, the work itself, policy and administration, administration, and supervision decrease, propensity to leave increases" (McBride, Munday, & Tunnell, 1992, p. 162". Several researchers have concluded that there is a direct connection between voluntary job turnover and job dissatisfaction (Cano and Miller, 1992; Glick, 1992; McBride, Munday, & Tunnell, 1992).

Moreover, often job dissatisfaction is directly attributable to stress resulting from role conflict or role ambiguity (McBride, Munday, & Tunnell, 1992; Simpson, 1984). Olsen (1993) argues that "recent work suggests that it is the strains and conflicts of daily life (rather than major, discrete life events that are most stressful.... These findings are particularly relevant to faculty who must perennially deal with 'excessive demands to perform too many discrete tasks,' poorly defined work-role boundaries, and perpetual time pressures as part of their work life" (p. 455).

The stressors felt by faculty tend to affect chairpersons to a greater degree. Gmelch and Wilke (1991) argue that chairpersons are "trapped between the pressures and demands of performing not only as a faculty member, but also as an administrator" (p. 30). This dual role means that they not only experience the common faculty stressors, they also experiences the unique pressures "of 'establishing compatibility among institutional,' 'departmental and personal goals,' 'completing paperwork on time,' 'attending meetings,' and 'dealing with university rules and regulations" (p. 30).

Dissatisfied employees who remain on the job tend to be unproductive and, in some case, counterproductive. This unproductively can be exacerbated when the employee is in a management position. When the individual is in a management or leadership position job dissatisfaction can reduce the productivity of others within the organization. Managers feeling unsatisfied can cause considerable morale damage to the units they supervise.

The quality of academic departments is the single most important management position when it comes to determining the quality of institutions Numerous researchers have demonstrated that a dissatisfied department chairperson can have disastrous effects on the morale of a department/division (Madron, Craig, and Mendel, 1967). Therefore it is important for colleges and universities to determine the level of job satisfaction of chairpersons.

Although there are no reported studies of job satisfaction among chairpersons, some literature does exist from which we can extrapolate some relevant findings. Some of the most salient research deals with stress connected to role conflict and role ambiguity. In academic institutions individuals who experience role conflict and/or role ambiguity often express job dissatisfaction (Carroll, 1976; McBride, Munday & Tunnell, 1992). Job dissatisfaction is positively correlated with voluntary turnover in colleges. (Chieffo, 1991; Glick, 1992; McBride, Munday & Tunnell, 1992). Therefore, individuals who experience role conflict and/or role ambiguity tend to feel less commitment to an organization and are more likely to leave.

The literature is somewhat divided on the whether role ambiguity or role conflict contribute more to job dissatisfaction for academicians. Chieffo (1991) cited research findings that indicated that "role ambiguity--explained 47% of the variation in organizational commitment levels" (p. 16). McBride, Munday & Tunnell (1992) in a study of community college faculty, claim "the propensity to leave is influenced by role conflict to a greater extent than it is by role ambiguity" (p. 162). In their study of the sources of stress for department chairpersons, Gmelch and Burns (1991) concluded "it may not be the ambiguity of the position which stress chairs as much as the role-conflict...." (p. 12).

Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that both role conflict or role ambiguity contributes heavily to job dissatisfaction (Cavenar, Dill, & Bethune, 1987). The consequences of role ambiguity and role conflict are lack of job involvement, lowered job performance, tension, and propensity to leave the organization" (McBride, Munday & Tunnell, 1992 p. 159). Cano and Miller similarly observe that "several researchers have attributed job turnover, absenteeism and job burnout to a lack of job satisfaction" (p. 9). Therefore, there appears to be a direct connection between role stress and voluntary job turnover. In a 1967 study of college faculty, Brown found that dissatisfied faculty had a 14.1% chance of voluntarily leaving a college compared to 4.3%

chance of satisfied faculty voluntarily leaving. Simpson (1984) found that "division heads at colleges with a rapid turnover rate" experienced more role strain than those at institutions with less rapid turnover.

Research demonstrates that the department/division chairpersons' position at both four-year and two-year colleges is fraught with role conflict and role ambiguity (Gmelch & Burns, 1991). "Of all the administrative positions in a college this one has the most role conflict and ambiguity" (Fife, 1982, p. i). Research has demonstrated that there is a connection between role stress and job dissatisfaction for academic department/division chairpersons (Simpson, 1984). "A statistically significant correlation exists between the presence of role conflict with decreased job satisfaction for department chairperson" (Austin & Gamson, 1983, p. 64). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that increased job dissatisfaction among department or division chairpersons is just as likely to lead to job turnover as it is in other managerial positions.

The consequences for higher education could be quite devastating. Researchers and educational leaders resoundingly affirm that the chairperson is the most important administrative position. It has almost been taken for granted that the quality of a university or college is determined by the quality of its departments. "...[A]lmost all will agree that the stature of individual departments largely determines the stature of the institution" (Bennett, 1983, p. 52). Accordingly, the success of a college or university in achieving its mission depends heavily on the willingness of its academic departments to buy into the institutional mission. Therefore, those interested in achieving excellence in education need to begin at the departmental level.

If the quality of academic departments is vital to the well-being of colleges and universities, then the quality of departmental leadership is critical. In fact, according to Whetten and Whetten (1985) "...the most powerful predictor of organizational effectiveness in colleges and universities is administrative behavior. Results from... research show that administrators are more important than environment, structure, age, institution type, and control in accounting for performance" (pp. 35-36). Department/division chairpersons are not only the most numerous of all administrators, but also because at colleges "the power for decision making lies at the bottom rather than the top" (Fife, 1982, p. i), they possess considerable power to shape the institution.

Gmelch and Miskin (1993) estimate that there are over 50,000 department chairpersons in four-year colleges and universities alone. If we consider two-year colleges, the number will nearly double. In all it is likely that chairpersons outnumber all other administrators by 5 to 1. Therefore, the most important administrator within a college or university is the chairperson. Peltason (1984), the president of the prestigious American Council on Education, unequivocally asserts "an institution can run for a long time with an inept president but not for long with inept chairpersons" (p. xi). Moreover, the

importance of departmental leadership is no less critical for two-year colleges than four-year colleges.

> The success of individual community colleges in the decades ahead will depend upon their ability to respond quickly to the educational needs of their service area with relevant, high-quality instruction furnished via a flexible delivery system--and at a competitive cost. Given this charge and the organizational chart of a typical community college, any beginning student of organizational behavior would quickly point to the first-level supervisor, the department/division head, as a key determinant in the future of the community college (Hammons, 1984, p. 14).

Therefore, it would also appear the department chairperson is the essential player in creating a departmental culture. An unhappy department chairperson is in a position to cause a great deal of damage to a college. If a department chairperson's job dissatisfaction causes him or her to leave the college, the college will incur the costs of replacement. However, if the chairperson decides (or has no other options but) to stay she or he can wreck havoc on the morale of faculty. It becomes, therefore, imperative to study the levels and causes of job dissatisfaction among department/division chairpersons.

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